

released on bail in October but re-arrested in December and sentenced to a month in prison while awaiting further charges. She was released at the end of the year.

In August, several UN Special Rapporteurs jointly urged the Bahraini government to cease harassing human rights defenders.

## Prisoners of conscience

Prisoners of conscience, including those sentenced in connection with mass popular protests in 2011, remained in prison. They appeared to have been targeted for their anti-government views.

■ Ebrahim Sharif, 'Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja and 11 other leading critics of the government were serving prison terms ranging from five years to life. Their convictions and sentences were confirmed in September. They were convicted of establishing terrorist groups to overthrow the government and change the Constitution, and on other charges that they denied, despite a lack of evidence that they had used or advocated violence.

■ Mahdi 'Issa Mahdi Abu Dheeb, former president of the Bahrain Teachers' Association, had his conviction upheld but his sentence reduced from 10 to five years in prison by the High Criminal Court of Appeal in October. In September 2011, an unfair military court convicted him of calling a teachers' strike, inciting hatred and seeking to overthrow the government by force, despite a lack of evidence to support the charges. He said he was tortured following his arrest in 2011 while held incommunicado in pre-trial detention.

■ Six health professionals, including 'Ali 'Esa Mansoor al-'Ekri and Ghassan Ahmed 'Ali Dhaif, were arrested in October the day after the Court of Cassation confirmed their convictions and upheld reduced prison sentences of between one month and five years imposed on them in June. Originally, they were sentenced to between five and 15 years in prison after an unfair trial in September 2011. The appeal court quashed the convictions of several others. Two of the six were released at the end of their sentences, but the four others were held at al-Jaw prison at the end of the year.

## Freedom of assembly

On 30 October the Interior Minister banned all rallies and gatherings alleging that they allowed people to express opposition to the government and led to rioting, violence and destruction of property. He said

the ban would remain in place until "security is maintained" and that anyone breaching the ban would be prosecuted. The ban was lifted in December and the Ministry of the Interior announced a proposal to amend the Code on Public Meetings, Processions and Gatherings, which imposed restrictions on the right to freedom of assembly.

■ Sayed Yousif Almuhaftah, a human rights activist, was detained on 2 November for attending an unauthorized gathering to document police behaviour towards protesters. He was released two weeks later and the charges of "illegal gathering" were dropped. He was re-arrested in December and charged with "spreading false news".

## Death penalty

One death sentence was reportedly imposed in March and upheld by the Court of Appeal in November. There were no executions. Two death sentences imposed in 2011 by a military court were quashed by the Court of Cassation and the two defendants were retried before a civilian court.

## Amnesty International visits/reports

✈️ Amnesty International cancelled a planned visit to Bahrain in March when the government imposed new visa restrictions on international NGOs. Trial observers representing Amnesty International visited Bahrain in August and September.

📄 Flawed reforms: Bahrain fails to achieve justice for protesters (MDE 11/014/2012)

📄 Bahrain: Reform shelved, repression unleashed (MDE 11/062/2012)

# BANGLADESH

## PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH

Head of state:

Zillur Rahman

Head of government:

Sheikh Hasina

**Some 30 extrajudicial executions were reported. State security forces were implicated in torture and other ill-treatment and at least 10 enforced disappearances. Political violence resulted in the death of at least four men. Women continued to be subjected to various forms of violence. The government failed to protect Indigenous**

**communities from attack by Bengali settlers. At least 111 workers died in a factory fire, some allegedly because officials refused to let them leave the premises. More than 20 Buddhist temples and monasteries, one Hindu temple and scores of Buddhist homes and shops were set on fire during a communal attack. One person was executed and at least 45 people were sentenced to death.**

## Background

In January, the Prime Minister stated that no human rights violations had been committed in the country.

Political violence escalated in December, when opposition parties tried to impose day-long general strikes. At least four people died and dozens of strikers and police sustained injuries. Jamaat-e-Islami demanded the release of their leaders currently being tried on war crimes charges. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) demanded that the forthcoming general elections be held under a caretaker government. Members of a group affiliated with the governing party attacked opposition members, beating and stabbing one bystander to death.

National and international concern about allegedly high levels of corruption were echoed in June when the World Bank cancelled US\$1.2 billion credit for the construction of Padma bridge in central Bangladesh, due to the government's insufficient response to allegations of corruption. An inquiry by the Anti-Corruption Commission remained open.

The authorities continued to raise concerns with India over killings of Bangladeshis by Indian border control forces. More than a dozen Bangladeshis were killed by Indian forces while crossing the border into India.

## Extrajudicial executions

At least 30 people were victims of alleged extrajudicial executions. Police claimed they had been killed in gun battles with security forces. Families said they had been killed after being arrested by people in plain clothes identifying themselves as Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) personnel or other police. No one was brought to justice for these killings.

■ RAB personnel allegedly shot dead Mohammad Atear Rahman (also known as Tofa Molla), a farmer, in Kushtia district on 12 September. RAB said he was killed in "crossfire", although Atear Rahman's family and other witnesses said RAB had arrested him at his

home the previous evening. His body reportedly bore three gunshot wounds, two in the back.

## Torture and other ill-treatment

Torture and other ill-treatment were widespread, committed with virtual impunity by the police, RAB, the army and intelligence agencies. Methods included beating, kicking, suspension from the ceiling, food and sleep deprivation, and electric shocks. Most detainees were allegedly tortured until they "confessed" to having committed a crime. Police and RAB allegedly distorted records to cover up the torture, including by misrepresenting arrest dates.

## Enforced disappearances

At least 10 people went missing throughout the year. In most cases the victims were never traced. Those bodies that were recovered bore injuries, some caused by beatings.

■ Ilias Ali, Sylhet division secretary of the opposition BNP, disappeared together with his driver Ansar Ali on 17 April. The government promised to investigate the case but provided no information by the end of the year.

## Violence against women and girls

Women continued to be subjected to various forms of violence. These included acid attacks, murder for failing to pay the requested dowry, flogging for religious offences by illegal arbitration committees, domestic violence, and sexual violence.

■ Aleya Begum and her daughter were arrested without a warrant on 9 September and were allegedly tortured at Khoksa police station in Kushtia district. After two days they were transferred to Kushtia city police station and kept in a dark room. The daughter, a college student, was separated from her mother at night and sexually abused by police officers. The two women were released on 18 September, after appearing in court. Aleya Begum and her daughter shared their story with the media, and were arrested and jailed again on 26 September.

## Indigenous Peoples' rights

As in previous years, the authorities failed to settle Indigenous Peoples' claims to land that had been seized from them during the internal armed conflict (1975-1997), or recently occupied by increasing numbers of Bengali settlers. Tension between the two communities and the failure of the security forces to

protect local Indigenous people against attacks by Bengali settlers led to several clashes and injuries on both sides.

■ At least 20 people were injured in a clash between Indigenous people and Bengali settlers in Rangamati on 22 September. Local people said security forces came to the scene but failed to stop the violence.

## Workers' rights

Trade union leaders supporting garment factory workers' rallies against low pay and poor working conditions were harassed and intimidated. One man was killed.

■ Trade union leader Aminul Islam went missing on 4 April. He was found dead a day later in Ghatail town, north of Dhaka. His family saw evidence of torture on his body and believed he had been abducted by security forces. He had previously been arrested and beaten by members of the National Security Intelligence for his trade union activities.

■ At least 111 workers died from burns and other injuries, some allegedly because factory officials refused to open the gates to let them escape a fire that broke out at Tazreen Fashion in Savar town, north of the capital Dhaka, in November.

## Communal violence

Attacks against members of minority communities took a new turn in late September. Thousands of people protesting against an image posted on Facebook of the Qur'an, which they considered derogatory, set fire to more than 20 Buddhist temples and monasteries, one Hindu temple and scores of homes and shops in the southern cities of Cox's Bazar and Chittagong.

## Death penalty

At least 45 people were sentenced to death. One man was executed in April.

# BELARUS

## REPUBLIC OF BELARUS

Head of state:

Alyaksandr Lukashenka

Head of government:

Mikhail Myasnikovich

**Prisoners of conscience remained in detention; some were sentenced to increased prison terms for violating prison rules. Civil society activists, including human rights defenders and journalists, faced violations of their rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association. Three men were executed.**

## Background

On 5 July, the UN Human Rights Council voted to appoint a Special Rapporteur on Belarus, following the adoption of a report by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights which documented a serious decline in the respect for human rights since December 2010.

Parliamentary elections on 23 September failed to return any opposition candidates. The OSCE election observation mission found violations of the rights to freedom of expression and association and concluded that the elections were not free or fair. On 27 August the Central Election Committee decreed that any candidates who called for an election boycott should be denied airtime, effectively depriving two opposition parties of any media coverage.

## Prisoners of conscience

Six people remained in prison in connection with their participation in a demonstration on 19 December 2010, at least four of whom – Mykalaj Statkevich, Pavel Sevyarynets, Zmitser Dashkevich and Eduard Lobau – were prisoners of conscience.

■ On 24 January, Minsk City Court refused Ales Bialiatski's appeal against his four-and-a-half-year sentence for "concealment of income on a large scale", and in September the sentence was upheld by the Supreme Court. Ales Bialiatski, chairperson of Human Rights Centre Viasna, and Vice-President of the International Federation for Human Rights, was sentenced on 24 November 2011. The conviction was related to the use of personal bank accounts in Lithuania and Poland to support the work of Human Rights Centre Viasna in Belarus.